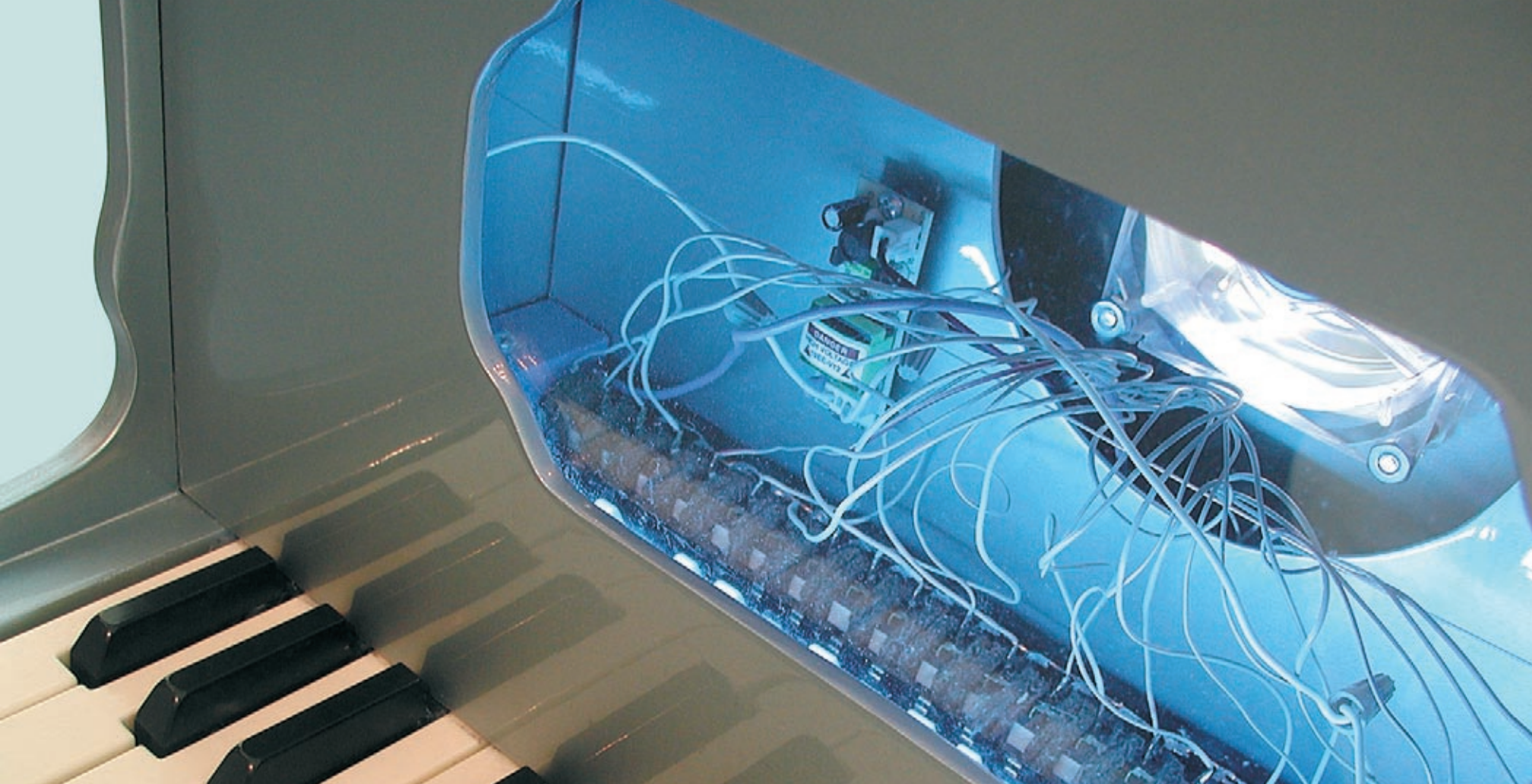




# Zeloso

Anthony Luensman



## **Zeloso (It., dzěh-loh'šöh): zealously, enthusiastically.**

Having set aside an entire floor of its new Zaha Hadid-designed building for works of art directed to children and families, the Contemporary Arts Center had to then decide what that might mean. Curator of Education Lisa Buck had the good sense to suggest that artists, invited to make proposals

burdened by few rules, would provide the best guidance.

And so we began with charmingly off-the-wall schemes from Allan Wexler, Andrea Zittel, Kim Abeles and other first-rank artists, each implicitly offering a visual answer. They were good ideas, too, but only Tony Luensman nailed it down in a word. *Zeloso*. It is a title, but it is also a command. Traditionally one of those instructions a composer writes above certain passages of music to commu-

nicate the desired mood to performers, Luensman uses it to direct us all to bring enthusiasm and energy to the art presented in the top-floor galleries we eventually called "the UnMuseum."

It takes a certain courage for an ambitious artist to make works of art for kids. Too many people think art for children must be childish art (when in fact, it must be art first—at the same level of intelligence and ingenuity we expect of any work of quality).

But the risk of not being taken seriously is only one reason guts are needed. More intimidating is the responsibility one takes on: entertain, yes, but more importantly, engage. It is daring to try to reverse the modern forces working to turn each active, omnivorous child into passive, spoon-fed consumer. Tony Luensman attacks the problem with exuberance, with zeal.

*Charles Desmarais*

*Charles Desmarais is Curator at Large of the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, where he served as Director from 1995 to 2004.*

## Singin' & Ringin' Chandelier

Beauty or the Beast? Cocteau's 1946 film *La Belle et la Bête* asked, "Who is the master?" Does *Singin' & Ringin' Chandelier* announce the visitor at the entrance of the museum or warn? All is not as it seems. Dramatically suspended from the glass-paneled skylight, the UnMuseum "doorbell" astonishes visitors arriving at the top of the 6th floor stairway. Outwardly, it appears to be an antique chandelier—rather romantic for this contemporary setting—yet, like the fixtures of Christian Berard's castle, the chandelier has a mind of its own. Press the button and lights fade up, a soprano (Blythe Walker) embarks on a remark-

ably high-pitched aria, and then, presto! She is drowned out by a seismic shaking and electronic fusillade of the chandelier possessed. Crystals rattle, and viewers gasp in delight.

In concept, *Singin' & Ringin'* is related to all the works of Luensman's 2002 series *Irato*—kinetic sculptures (some made from modified or reconstructed objects like *NutoneTricycle* or *Kimitakakun/Monkey*) that respond to the viewer with varying displays of light and acoustic effects—a reflection of the artist's preoccupation with the look of sound. He eventually referred to some of them as "doorbells."

*Singin' and Ringin' Chandelier*, 2002–03; modified antique chandelier, handblown glass speaker bell, electronics, solenoids, cable,

pushbutton, original sound recordings by soprano Blythe Walker (edited by Luensman); approximately 3' diameter x 3.5' high.



## Liner Notes

by Kelly O'Donnell

### Toy Pipe Organ

The Sara M. and Patricia A. Vance Education Center: The UnMuseum can be a noisy, chaotic place with each piece vying for attention. Like a child, the artwork must assert itself in its space to be noticed.

*Toy Pipe Organ*—a modified antique toy piano—sits alone, brightly painted but in miniature, on the gallery floor. "I'm not what you think," is its message, and it literally jumps up and down to tell the viewer so. Expecting a tinkling of musical innocence, the unsuspecting player triggers booming pipe organ samples from speakers above. Its charm lies in its pompous, demanding little personality.

*Toy Pipe Organ* is one in a series that Luensman refers to as "piano variations"—piano forms modified according to how the artist imagined the pianos' individual personalities—that, since 1999, has played with the sound, look and function of this most familiar instrument to haunting and sometimes comic effect.

*Toy Pipe Organ*, 2003; modified toy piano, CCT light, solenoid, electronics, speakers, computer; 2' length x 2.5' high x 1' depth.

## Paavo's Hands

### Paavo's Hands

By virtue of its placement and theatrical staging, *Paavo's Hands* serves as the real introduction to the UnMuseum. When visitors exit the 6th-floor elevator, most children immediately run to the red-carpeted dais, boosting them to adult height and readying them to conduct. It's a signature piece for *Zeloso* and the UnMuseum. Equally appealing to children and adults, it does not reveal its secret until engaged—the participant waves his or her hands through the proscenium and literally "conducts" a symphony orchestra. A savvy child will wait for the musicians to warm up (a 3-second recording) before launching into triggered excerpts from Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*, stepping off the dais, and concluding to thunderous applause.

A concertgoer and music enthusiast, Luensman always wondered what it would be like to conduct a symphony orchestra and to feel the sound and power of music coming toward him. The title of the piece came first, named for (and endorsed by) the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra's acclaimed new musical director and chief conductor, Paavo Järvi. An empowering and entertaining experience for children (and even more so—adults), this sculpture is a natural fit for the CAC's UnMuseum.

*Paavo's Hands*, 2003; wood, sensors, computer, neon; 4' length x 8' height x 3' depth.





## Overblown Piano

*Overblown Piano* is perhaps the friendliest nod to the youngest patrons of the CAC. A cartoon-like inflatable, polyvinyl form explodes out from the wall, inviting touch; its amusing roundness and blue CCT glow suggest a ghost in the machine. Its pleasingly simple look belies a sophisticated design and engineering. *Overblown Piano* conjures a multitude of micro-compositions from its eight overblown keys. Luensman invited New York composer Paul Hogan (a frequent collaborator with the artist in an electro-acoustic ensemble, Current Quartet) to compose a set of “mini” digital recordings of acoustic and syn-

thesized sounds that evoke the playful spring and bounce of the keys as well as the airiness of *Overblown's* presence. Thus, the compositions have the quality of sound compressed in time.

From dismantled piano harps to *Irato's* bisected *Piano for One Hand*, *Overblown* is the latest “piano variation” and the first piano Luensman made from scratch. Like all the pieces of *Zeloso*, it empowers the player with a single gesture.

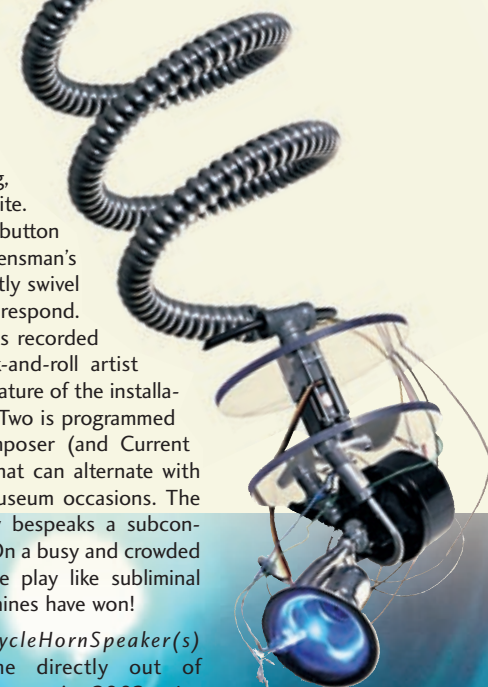
*Overblown Piano*, 2003; inflatable polyvinyl, acrylic, polycarbonate, metal, CCT lights, digital soundboard, speakers, electronics, original compositions by Paul Hogan; 5' length x 5' high x 4' depth.

## BicycleHornSpeaker[s]

The most installation-like of all the UnMuseum pieces, *BicycleHornSpeaker(s)* snake mischievously down from the ceiling, adding an ambiance to the entire *Zeloso* suite. When the unwary visitor activates a pushbutton hanging from the wall, two bike horns (in Luensman's trademark flexible conduit material) defiantly swivel on servomotors to confront the viewer and respond. Horn One contains 20 original guitar licks recorded specifically for *Zeloso* by legendary rock-and-roll artist Peter Frampton. Adding to the subversive nature of the installation—one for the adult audience—Horn Two is programmed with sound fragments by electronic composer (and Current Quartet collaborator) Michael Barnhart that can alternate with other recordings generated for special museum occasions. The tinny sound quality bespeaks a subconscious inner voice. On a busy and crowded museum floor, these play like subliminal messages. The machines have won!

*BicycleHornSpeaker(s)* came directly out of Luensman's 2002 piece *Iratoplex* and reappeared in 2003's *Eolian*, but have an earlier precedent in Saw Theater's production *Account Me Puppet*, where the artist favored them not only as a sculptural element but also for their thin, high broadcast-like sound which was the perfect pitch for the internal monologues of the fallen Archangel in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

*BicycleHornSpeaker(s)*, 2003; bicycle horn, speaker driver, conduit, wire, digital soundboard, servomotor, electronics, LED, pushbutton, original sound recordings by Peter Frampton and Michael Barnhart; approximately 6" diameter x 2' high.



## Steel Drums

Part of the privilege of the UnMuseum is to touch; with the invitation to touch comes the possibility of interaction. *Steel Drums* offers that on a raucous scale. The percussion of the *Zeloso* suite, *Steel Drums* is deceptively simple in appearance yet electronically complex in design. Two, giant, stainless-steel, cylindrical drums are suspended, one atop the other, from the ceiling. When activated, the industrial joystick pans drum sounds and vibrations up and down the sculpture. An alternate axis directs pitch shifts. From its ominous appearance, you anticipate a big sound, and *Steel Drums* delivers in a powerful way.

*Steel Drums* is an experiment in subwoofer design—a stereo version of a piece created for *Irato* in 2002 (*Stainless Steel Doorbell for a Larger House*) that featured dual piano pedals for the viewer to step upon—one to trigger “interior” bird and chicken sounds from a small speaker hidden within the giant subwoofer (referencing the live and painted fowl of previous artists), the other to thunderously vibrate the stainless-steel drum itself. The CAC version is doubled in size and has more parameters for the viewer to control.

*Steel Drums*, 2003; stainless steel vats, subwoofer drivers, joystick, computer; approximately 4' diameter x 10' high.



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## Anthony Luensman

A multimedia artist who often explores sound production through viewer interaction, Anthony Luensman has undertaken residencies, performances and exhibitions in Cincinnati, Detroit, New York, San Francisco, Taipei (Taiwan) and Sapporo (Japan). He is a frequent collaborator with other artists, choreographers and musicians including the electro-acoustic ensemble Current Quartet. Luensman currently resides in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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